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“FOLLOWING MUSIC” IN A MOUNTAIN LAND

By JOSEPHINE MCGILL

THE history of æsthetic interests in the United States offers few phenomena more surprising than this: that a region somewhat unprepossessingly known to the outside world should be one of the few sections of our land where there is the traditional cult of an art and where, moreover, local fancy has invented a special term for the practice of this art.

The fastnesses of the Kentucky mountains, too exclusively identified with feuds and illicit stills, may boast this particular æsthetic activity known in the vernacular as “followin’ music.” The quaint phrase is a general formula. The music to which it refers may be thus classified: traditional English and Scotch ballads; songs of later origin bordering on folk-ballads; local improvisations, notably feud songs; finally, religious and play songs.

Of these groups distinctly the most important is the first—that of the old English and Scotch ballads brought to this country by the forbears of to-day’s mountaineers. The literary values of these “song-ballets” have been much discussed; but little attention has been paid to the musical settings—the wings of song upon which the poetry of the ballads was borne across the ocean and has been sustained down the centuries. Yet, as Professor Alphonso Smith of the University of Virginia has recently said: “It was as song that the ballad was born, and as song that it survives.” Primarily as song are the ballads extant among those whom Dr. Frost of Berea College aptly names “our contemporary ancestors”—those Kentucky highlanders whose diction and customs are often Elizabethan.

The particular section of the State which has preserved its melodious treasures is the Eastern mountainous section, fourteen thousand square miles in extent. The region is variously rich. It contains some of the largest coal fields and the noblest timber land in the world. The diction and customs—so little altered since the adventurous pioneers first entered these parts—offer

valuable data to philologist and historian. Other travellers find the chief charm of the place to be its beauty—though the difficult roads often justify an old mountaineer’s obloquy: “an everlastingly ill-situated country.” Immemorially this picturesque wild land has been a good hunting-ground,—of yore for Indians and early colonists and still for city Nimrods. But good hunting and other enticements seem prosaic compared with the quest of the “song-ballets”.

If this particular chase be not a sanguinary one, it is nevertheless a spirited adventure demanding patience and a dauntless will. Tedious journeys must be made on horseback or muleback, up creek-beds always stony, sometimes extremely narrow, yet often the only paths through the highland wildernesses. Nor when the balladist has arrived in the neighborhood of some singer is the devoir as near accomplishment as might seem. On the contrary, suspense and uncertainty continue to rule the situation. As in more sophisticated artistic spheres, elements of temperament and character must continually be reckoned with; above all, that dominant trait of the mountaineers—pride. If they suspect the stranger of a patronizing, critical or otherwise superior attitude, likely as not they will decline to share their melodious stores. Mood, languor from overwork, or failure of “re-collection” may make the singer mute. Moreover, there are two other forces excellent in themselves which often thwart the ballad-hunter. If a wave of Temperance or Religion has recently swept by, there is a tendency to renounce singing and such like diversions.

But for all these baffling obstacles, the quest of the song-ballet vigorously allures. Though roads be difficult and balladists recalcitrant and elusive, it is sufficiently rewarding to pursue the quest, to wander up wooded slopes where no sound save bird-song, breeze or waterfall disturbs the stillness—till suddenly from across the valley or down the mountainside floats some such ancient strain as *Lord Randal*, *The Turkish Lady*, or *Fair Margaret and Sweet William*. As one halts one’s horse to listen, that sense of the spirit of place—perhaps more poignant in a steep-walled mountain land than elsewhere—is for the nonce in abeyance and the hearer is transported from the almost virgin upland wildwood to English manor or Scottish castle where originally these strains rang forth.

The first adventure of the present collector consisted of two days and a half on horseback, broken by nights beneath humble but friendly roofs, on the way to the home of a young mountaineer with a renowned repertoire. Between noble forest trees the paths

wound upward, finally widening into a clearing where Beauty fairly smote the vision—the loveliness of valley landscapes and, far as sight could sweep, “Alps on Alps.” The road to this glorious view was made by a young mountaineer who has had good educational advantages and a chance to cast his lot among progressive city dwellers. But because of his fine passion for his native highlands he has preferred to pitch tent upon this majestic summit whence every morning across the valley he may greet the sunrise. Equally punctual is his observance of an evening ceremonial—a reading from the Bible to his small household or whatever guest may be sharing his hospitality. The poetry and dignity of his matutinal and vesper customs, the general tone of his simple but well-kept home, were an initiation into the qualities and possibilities of the mountaineers. It was an initiation which forthwith discredited the unsympathetic interpretations—so justly resented by native pride and self-respect—made by alien spirits who have seen in these parts chiefly intractable crudeness.

Among the treasures which the young host of the mountain-top shares with the ballad-hunter were two possessing the double interest of genuine antiquity and contemporary popularity. These—*The Turkish Lady* and what Samuel Pepys called “the little old Scotch song, *Barbara Allen*”—were often heard in different versions, but never more effectively than on this first occasion as sung to an accompaniment on the dulcimer. This instrument, in the vernacular “dulcimore,” is nearly a yard in length and resembles an elongated violin. It has three strings, the first and second being tuned to the same pitch, the third a fifth below; the range is two octaves and a quarter. Two prime effects are obtainable from the instrument; one similar to that of the ancient drone; the other, like the twanging of a banjo or guitar.

To the collector with a vestige of feeling for the historic, few experiences could have been more stirring than to have heard on this isolated peak a song so venerable as *The Turkish Lady*. According to some authorities the hero of the ballad is Sir Gilbert à-Becket, father of St. Thomas. This idea was rejected by Professor Child. But be the hero Sir Gilbert or another, a romantic enough discovery in the remote Kentucky altitudes of to-day is this song-ballet of a Knight:

In England bornéd,
And he was of some high degree;
He became uneasily discontented,
Some foreign land, some land to see.

He sailéd East, he sailéd West,
He sailéd unto the Turkish shore,
Till he was caught and put in prison
Never to be released any more.

The Turk, he had but one lone daughter,
And she was of some high degree;
She stole the keys of her father's dwelling
And vowed Lord Bateman she'd set free.

Naturally such a rescue demands the usual matrimonial pledge, after which the Knight returns to his own land and, alas, another lady. But “when seven long years have rolled around” the Turkish Lady's patience ends and she goes to seek the faithless one—

She rode till she came to the gate, she tingled;
It rang so loud but she wouldn't come in;
“O is this here Lord Bateman's castle,
And is his Lordship now within?”

Go remember him of a piece of bread,
Go remember him of a glass of wine,
Go remember him of the Turkish Lady
That freed him from the cold iron band.”

When the message is delivered, the hero

Stamped his foot upon the floor,
And burst his table in pieces three;
“I'll venture all my land and dwelling
The Turkish Lady has crossed the sea.”

Then, though the ceremonies are fairly well advanced, a change of brides is made—an arrangement satisfactory at least to the Turkish Lady and the groom, for all the latter's seeming infidelity.

The tune of the ballad is very simple, scarcely departing from the tonic harmony; it suggests the drone of the ancient music. The dulcimore afforded an appropriate accompaniment, as it did also for the particular version of Barbara Allen heard from the same balladist. Some versions run:

All in the merry month of May
When the green buds they were swelling.

But my host's rendering not unfittingly transposed the episode to the melancholy days—

Late in the season of the year
When the yellow leaves were falling,
Young James Graham of the west countrie
Fell in love with Barbra Allan.

With considerable charm the children of the Hindman Settlement School, Knott County, Kentucky, sing the version, "All in the merry month of May," as well as that beginning: "Late in the season of the year." The latter, in minor key, lends itself to the plaintive effects achievable upon the "dulcimore." As may be fancied the chief variety to be obtained therefrom is that of rhythm. This is true also of a more primitive indigenous, and highly popular, instrument—a hickory limb strung with a single wire. The one which the collector saw was four feet long, but greater length is desirable. The performer rests one end of the instrument upon the floor, pressing his lips to the other end, thus supposedly improving the tone. There is art in the playing of even so primitive an instrument.

The hickory limb and dulcimore share popularity with the banjo, violin and reed organ—sometimes known as the "little cupboard organ." The violin—locally "the fiddle"—is often played with a bow strung with horse-hair. Such an instrument was employed in a fiddling contest, a notable incident in the expedition of "following music." One competitor was a woman, "vast old" in the words of another dame equally "bowed and satiate with the monotony of years" as Mr. Arnold Bennett might say. However with much esprit the aged competitor participated in the contest, dancing as well as fiddling. Nevertheless she did not win the prize, the verdict having been partly the result of anti-feminist prejudice, for to some spectators her dancing gave no little scandal—a fact which she herself seemed to relish. What thoughts were in her mind as she sawed away upon her humble instrument, it were difficult to state; but surely they were far removed from attention to mere technique. This meantime was achieved somehow while she turned her head sideways and dreamed as she danced and played. Her averted face symbolized the history of the mountain people. In her expression there was a detachment from the rush of affairs, a resignation to the inevitable; yet withal in the clear profile an evidence of vitality, of race, giving one hope for her people's future.

The advance of progress into these "high hills and valleys so deep" became apparent during another adventure of this lyrical quest. The scene was a cabin with its own arresting distinctiveness. According to the wish of its chatelaine it had been painted

"blue and white like yon sky." The original and cheerful taste which dictated this color scheme was further revealed in the occupant's raiment. This represented a radical departure from the custom of the country which of yore prescribed black dress and sunbonnet for matrons. No such trappings and suits of woe for the dweller in the cerulean-tinted cabin. Despite stern local criticism she persisted in wearing garments somewhat expressed in fancy. This spirit of innovation doubtless resulted from the fact that her home was less secluded than many of the mountain lodges whose isolation often fosters quietness of mood and taste. The cabin—"blue and white like yon sky," was a way-station where pilgrims replenished their stores of fodder and other necessities. The constant coming to and fro was enlivening and remunerative to the lady of the house but less propitious for the ballad-seeker, as it had tended to efface the memory of songs once known; hence after hearing a little "pickin" on the banjo, the collector passed on to another goal where richer melodious booty was promised.

This new destination was a lonely spot at the head of a narrow creek in a world of green and silver, repeated upon bole and leaf of beeches and the stream silvering over the woodland reflected in its ever-shimmering surface. For all the surrounding beauty, the place seemed apparently "at the end of everything". It seemed strange that here men might live from generation to generation and, as the case proved, in cheer. As we arrived, the rain had begun to fall softly, but not wishing to force hospitality we remained upon our horses till the balladist of the family, the mother, came out to us. On learning our errand, she began to sing almost immediately. In the softly falling rain she leaned upon the fence and intoned in a high nasal voice *The Sorrowful Fate of Fair Margaret and Sweet William*. The performance had a charm which induced forgetfulness of the shower and fatigue of the journey. While the mother sang, her beautiful dark-eyed daughter came and stood in the doorway; she might have been a highland sister to Jeanne d'Arc or some other peasant girl of history who, "born better than her place, still lent grace to the lowliness she knew." About the mother who also exemplified one of the finer mountain types there was a delicacy, a touch of romance which linked her with the subjects of the old songs she sang.

One of the fairest of ladies that ever died for love is the heroine of *Fair Margaret and Sweet William*. This song possesses a quality which defies time, the perversion of the text and the personality of the singer. It is in major key but the mountain woman's

plaintive rendition of it set minor cadences ringing in the heart. This was especially the case as we listened while the gentle obligato of the rain intensified the pathos of words and melody:

Lyddy Marget died like it might have been to-day;
 Sweet William died to-morrow;
 Lyddy Marget died for pure, pure love,
 Sweet William died for sorrow.

Lyddy Marget was buried in the lower church-yard,
 Sweet William was buried in the higher;
 And out of her grave there sprang a red rose,
 And out of his grave a briar.

The singer of *Fair Margaret and Sweet William* initiated the collector into the charms of another song locally popular and likewise one of the most esteemed in the formal compilations of English and Scotch ballads where it appears as *The Demon Lover* and *The Old Salt Sea*. Prosaically known in the mountains as *The House Carpenter* or *The Ship Carpenter*, this ballad relates a wife's desertion of home and husband when, in the disguise of a former suitor, the demon lover wickedly beguiles her:

Well met, well met, my own true love;
 Well met, well met, says he;
 I've just returned from the old salt sea,
 And it's all for the love of thee.

I could have married a king's daughter dear,
 And she fain would have married me;
 But a crown of gold I did refuse,
 It was all fir the love of thee.

Whereupon the lady retorts that he might as well have availed himself of that matrimonial opportunity as she is now wedded to a House Carpenter—whom, however the Iniquitous One persuades her to leave. It is said that the American versions of the ballad tend to eliminate or minimize the supernatural elements. In the present ballad this is true on the whole; but with what effect of sinister fancy the supernatural appears in the final stanza of this song:

What hills, what hills are those, my love,
 That look so white like snow?
 They are the hills of heaven, my love,
 Where we will never go.

What hills, what hills, are yon, my love,
 That look so black and low?
 They are the hills of hell, my love,
 Where you and I must go.

This ballad offers a good example of what happens to the ballads in general in a region so far from the scene of their original composition. This House Carpenter for instance borrows lines now and then from *The Lass of Loch Royal or Fair Annie of Loch Royal*:

O who will shoe your feet, my love,
And who will glove your hand,
And who will kiss your red rosy lips
When I'm in a far distant land.

The surprise and delight of the collector may be fancied on hearing in still another version of the House Carpenter entitled *Old True Love*, these lines:

Her cheeks were like some blooming red rose
All in the month of June;
Her voice is like some sweet instrument
That's just been put in tune.

So fare you well, my own true love,
So fare you well a while;
I'm going away but to come back again
Though it were ten thousand mile.

These stanzas, however, have a tune of their own—quaint, plaintive, charming, with abrupt harmonic changes, fascinating but difficult to notate. *The House Carpenter* is sung to two tunes, both minor and interesting. They end differently—one by this descent: 3-2-1; the other, by 4-7-1; both intervals are common.

The balladist who sang *The House Carpenter* had a large repertoire, at one time even greater. Because of it the young people used to flock to her cabin from miles away—a commentary upon the rich social values the ballads have had for the lonely highlanders, to say nothing of their power of stirring half-starved imaginations. Such an influence has been exerted, for instance, by such a ballad as *Six King's Daughters*—a story similar to that of Bluebeard. The tune is a simple, lively melody with a frank rhythm of four beats, less dramatic than the narrative.

From the quiet scene where these songs of old sorrows and dire dooms were heard, a wide circuit was made to a small settlement of farm lands. Here the ballad-hunter was expected; but such is the reserve of these sequestered spirits, they at first gave no signs of anticipation. When, however, the collector was seen to be free from unkindness and mere idle curiosity, the friendliest reception was accorded.

In this special neighborhood dwelt a clan having distinct holdings in the realm of song. This family was composed of a grandmother, an unmarried daughter and a married daughter and her children. Among the most gratifying pleasures of the whole quest was the grandmother's recitation of *Darby and Joan*. This ancient dame, who well deserved the appellation "vast old," chanted with a rhythmical lilt in her voice and visions in her eyes; the performance might justly have provoked the envy of more sophisticated entertainers. Another and younger member of the family boasted that at one time she had known three hundred songs. Many of these were forgotten, but she finally droned several. As she did so, she might have been a mountain Lorelei; for unexpectedly she let down her long silky black hair, absent-mindedly combed it, singing "ein Lied dabei."

How intense this clan's love of music was may be deduced from this incident: A long journey was once undertaken by several members of the family. To break the tedium of the trip the party stopped over night at a friend's house. But neither the pilgrims nor the host and hostess retired; the whole company sat up all night singing, dancing, "running sets"—a diversion akin to the Virginia Reel.

After this family had shared ballads with me a neighbor was invited to come and sing to me. An engagement was made but not kept—the neighbor was detained by a pastoral tragedy of his own, his lambs having been eaten by marauding dogs. Finally, however, he appeared and in an impressive manner—a stalwart old man, lustily singing as he approached, his eyes twinkling, his personality radiant with vitality. His repertoire consisted of hymn-tunes—for later mention.

As the collector walked along one day in this melodious neighborhood, a voice called out asking if I were the "strange woman huntin' song-ballets." On admitting the charge the collector was invited to linger and listen—the interlocutor being a veritable mountain Madonna with a child constantly in her arms—a frail, half-blind babe. One of her first offerings was *Barbara Allen*, of which six versions of four variants were heard during the quest. The tune this woman sang was perhaps less ancient than the others but it had much charm, being in regular 4-4 time, cheerful in mood for all its "pitiful" final episode. To a tune almost identical with one setting of *Barbara Allen*, the mountain Madonna sang *Old King Cole*. Another of her lively ditties began:

Old Sister Phoebe was happy as could be
The night she sat under the June-apple tree.

More authoritatively “June-apple” is juniper—so much for oral transmission. Less blithe than this song but more impressive was *Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender*. This is a supreme example of the tragic ballad, the three principal characters in it all being slain before the story is told. The music is as sinister as the words. The verisimilitude of such narratives goes straight home to the mountaineers’ bosoms, familiar as they are with melodramatic episodes. Yet, apropos of Lord Thomas’s murderous temper, one old man asked me if I could “understand how a man could become to be enthralled like that.”

During the collector’s first week in the mountains she was told of a man who could sing all night without repeating himself. As became so gifted a personage, for some time he was so elusive as to arouse suspicions of being merely mythical. But, with his supreme reputation, he seemed worth waiting for. Worth waiting upon, suggested one of his friends who advised a morning’s pilgrimage to his house for the sake of persuading him to come sing to us. When we discovered him in his little woodland retreat at the head of a creek, we were tempted to suspect that shy reserve rather than august aloofness had been depriving us of his presence. The actual fact was that his cow had run off the day before and he had been busy seeking it. He was a quiet little man who had been something of a traveller and had at one time taught school; these experiences had given him a touch of dignity and amenity. With polite compliance he consented to return with us; so we set forth down the green slopes, my companion and I on horseback, the troubadour on foot—drifting into the woods now and then to take short cuts and thereby causing us no little anxiety lest he and his marvellous repertoire might utterly vanish. Finally he borrowed a mule and thereafter closely followed, enabling the ballad-seeker to pursue the journey with a serener mind.

When once heard, this gentle bard proved well worth anticipation and resolute capture. In the entire quest no experience gave keener delight than his singing of *The Golden Willow Tree* and *The Cherry Tree Carol*, to name his choicest numbers. One version of *The Golden Willow Tree* has as its hero Sir Walter Raleigh “sailing in the lowlands low” where his ship, “The Sweet Trinity,” is seized by “a false gallaly.” In the mountain version the sole hero is “the little bold cabin boy.” To hear the troubadour with unique rhythmic effects recount the story, to note the enjoyment of the listeners, to relish one’s own delight, is to be freshly aware of the charm of an imaginative musical and literary composition and an artistic rendition of the same. One of the

characteristic practices of the mountain singers is to ornament the tunes according to their own fancy—words, syllables, as well as notes being liberally added. Sir Charles Villiers Stanford notes this tendency among Hungarian and Irish musicians, a tendency encountered also among more primitive peoples. The effects thus produced, so different from those conventionally heard, stimulate speculation upon the mysterious sources of mood and emotion, personal or atavistic, which inspire such rhythmic elaboration. Genuine if singular pleasure was it to note the original melodic phrasing of these lines:

I had a little ship and I sailed her on the sea,
Crying: "O the land that lies so low!";
I had a little ship and I sailed her on the sea,
And she went by the name of The Golden Willow Tree,
As she sailed in the lowlands low, low, low,
As she sailed in the lowlands low.

Beguiling as was the rendition of this ballad, even more gratifying was the singer's presentation of that exquisite example of quaintness, naïveté, literary charm and enchanting melody—*The Cherry Tree Carol*. The finding of this ancient song so far in time and space from its original source is at once a testimony to the age-proof quality of its literary and musical elements and to the tenacity with which the Kentucky highlanders have preserved such treasures of poetry and song. The story is based upon Joseph's momentary mistrust of Mary when she asks him to gather her cherries from a wayside tree and for the first time gives him a hint of her Precious Burden:

Then Joseph flew in anger,
in anger flew he;
Let the Father of the Baby
gather cherries for thee;

Then the unborn Infant speaks:

Let my Mother have some cherries,
bow low down, cherry-tree;

The cherry-tree bowed low down,
bowed low down to the ground;
And Mary gathered cherries
while Joseph stood around.

Joseph being duly humbled by the happy miracle then asks: "O tell me little Baby, when your birthday will be?" The answer

has a special local interest from the fact that in many parts of the region the Nativity is celebrated on Old Christmas—

On the sixth day of January
my birth day will be;
When the stars in the elements
shall tremble with glee.

Especially musical was the family who effected my introduction to the singer of *The Cherry Tree Carol*. One relative was the subject of the unique boast that he could dance all night on a dinner-plate; there are of course dinner plates and dinner plates. Another member of the family sang *The Greenwood Side*—a variant of *The Cruel Mother*, in the Child Collection. To discover such a fine old ballad in such completeness was among the rewards of this often baffling quest. Mr. Child thus recorded this ancient song:

There lived a lady in London,
Alone, and alonie;
She's gone off to the good greenwood
Down by the greenwood sae bonnie.

The mountain version runs:

There was a lady in yonders town
Alone, alonie O;
She's taken her a walk one day
Down by the greenwood sidey O.

The music for this story of a cruel parent, no less indeed than a matricide, is appropriately melancholy though beautiful. It is one of the typically “hurtin” or what Autolycus called “the very pitiful” ballads so dear to the mountain folk, their gloomy preferences as well as their diction often linking them with their Elizabethan ancestors.

While the collector lingered in the musical neighborhood where *The Greenwood Side* was heard, one morning there walked in from several miles away a feeble dame. A first glance roused sympathy for her decrepitude—entirely unnecessary sympathy. In truth her élan vital was her chief characteristic. There was every evidence that curiosity about the stranger—the collector—had prompted the visit. But besides curiosity, high sociability may be mentioned as another inspiration of the early morning call. Desire for companionship is a prevailing trait among these people who suffer from so much enforced isolation. In this particular dame's case sociability was freely indulged in; she

spent her time visiting her children and her friends. An indefatigable pilgrim, week by week she might be seen trudging upland and valley, or perched aloft on the mail-hack or behind some one on a mule, thus shortening the way over rough roads.

The day she arrived the visit was unmistakably an "occasion," for which she had obviously dressed. Around the neck of her gingham frock a bright handkerchief lent a note of color—as did a string of blue beads. Her endearing gentleness and sweetness immediately worked the spell of pleasing personality. Besides her sociability and her curiosity, one more urge was responsible for her presence—a certain pardonable vainglory not uncommon in the artistic temperament. It soon transpired that she had a répertoire and was eager to share it. The most entertaining part of the performance was the singer's surprising memory and vitality. To special advantage these were displayed in her presentation of *Little Musgrave or Lord Daniel's Wife*. In the mountains this famous old song sometimes becomes *Lord Vanner's Wife*—by whatever name a ballad of singular charm, as the second stanza indicates:

One holiday, one holiday,
The very first month in the year,
They all went down to the old church house,
The gospel for to hear.

The first came down all dressed in red,
The next came down in green,
The next came down Lord Daniel's wife
As fine as any queen.

But for all this felicitous beginning the story is one of domestic infelicity and tragedy. The minor melody is distinctly Scottish. The twenty-eight stanzas, elsewhere forty-eight, are typical survivals of the erosion of age and changing circumstance.

From another ancient dame whose years might have been supposed to have dried the springs of song and fancy were heard two of the most interesting of all the ballads—*Lord Randal* and *The Gypsie Laddie*. Listening to these, sung to tunes of much charm, the ballad-hunter knew the rapture of the gold-washer when the ore begins to gleam. Again there was the satisfaction of noting afresh the perduring qualities of genuine poetry and music. A while before going on the trail of these mountain melodies the collector had heard Mr. Bispham's impressive interpretation of the Edward Ballad. With this so poignant a

memory, the ballad-seeker's delight may be fancied on hearing in a squalid mountain cabin the somewhat similar *Lord Randal*:

Where have you been Randal, it's Randal, my son,
Where have you been, Randal, my pretty sweet one?
O I've been a-courting, Mother make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart and I fain would lie down.

What will you leave to your father, it's Randal, my son?
What will you leave to your father, my pretty sweet one?
My land and fine buildings, Mother make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart and I fain would lie down.

Through legacies to the brother, sister, and mother the "incremental repetition" proceeds, attaining the dramatic climax similar to that of Edward:

What will you leave to your sweetheart, it's Randal, my son?
What will you leave to your sweetheart, my pretty sweet one?
A rope and a gallows, Mother make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart and I fain would lie down.

The music for this miracle of terse drama and pathos is in major key, swiftly moving in what Professor Gummere terms "abounding triple measure." The ballad is evidently a prized and common heritage of the descendants of Kentucky pioneers. One version from the Bluegrass section begins: "Where have you been Randal, taranter, my son?" Another variant heard from an old negro nurse characteristically runs: "Where have you been Miranda?" Miss Lucy Furman, who has so ably reproduced the mountain types in her stories, Mothering on Perilous, Sight to the Blind, etc., heard her grandfather sing: "Where have you been, Ronald?" This version doubtless antedates Sir Walter Scott's alteration of the hero's name to Randal, thereby connecting the episode with the death of Randolph, Earl of Murray.

The hero of *The Gypsie Laddie* has been identified with Lady Hamilton, wife of the Earl of Cassilis. But for all its possible historical associations when, to joy of singer and audience, this ballad is sung in some poor mountain cabin, there is a temptation to regard the historical element as but secondary to its intrinsic values of pure romance—from its first captivating line to the reckless avowal of the last stanza:

There came three gypsies from the north,
They were all wet and weary O;
They sang so neat and so complete,
It charmed the heart of the Lady O.

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The squire he came home one night,
 Inquiring for his lady O;
 The news so quickly lit on him:
 "She's gone with the dark-eyed gypsy O".

"Go saddle up my milk-white steed,
 Go saddle up my brownie O;
 And I will ride both day and night
 To overtake my honey O".

But the pursuit avails not:

"What cares I for house and land,
 What cares I for money O?
 I'd rather have a kiss from the gypsy's lips
 Than all your land and money O".

As the elderly woman droned these romantic measures she knitted steadily upon a tufted counterpane—thus simultaneously practicing two arts once dear to some ancestor across the ocean and the centuries. She added charm to the tune by her sweet old-fashioned high-quavering vocalization. But she illustrated, too, a mood frequent among the mountain balladists—especially the women: a mood of such utter languor or preoccupation that the listener is constantly fearful lest song and singer may fade away. This is partly the result of the monotonous isolated life; partly because in this land of mountain torrents and bitter winters the women work so hard in the fields that it is a temptation, when possible, to relax. Hence sometimes before the end of the ballad they are inclined to stop; the collector must exorcize their lassitude and indifference. Again in abstract monotonous fashion they will sing the twenty or thirty stanzas of a ballad. Often, meantime, this mode of singing is abruptly varied by startling intervals defying conventional notation in the present stage of our scale. The elasticity of their intonation and their rhythms lends much variety to their performance and is not without suggestion to the more sophisticated musician—if frequently a test of the subtlety of his auricular faculty. Sometimes in the hope of hearing the tune more exactly I asked them to sing in a higher key; invariably they would sing more loudly, thus interpreting the word, high, according to local code.

Lady Gay, or *The Wife of Usher's Well* has been pronounced the "most beautiful of all the English Ballads." The belief, so recurrent in folk-poetry that the rest of the dead is disturbed by the grief of the living, is perhaps nowhere poetized more touchingly than in this ballad of the bereaved mother:

“There is a King in heaven,” she said,
 “That wears the brightest crown;
 Pray send to me my three little babes,
 To-night or in the morning soon.”

It was just about old Christmas time,
 The nights being cold and clear;
 She looked and saw her three little babes
 Come running home to her.

She set a table both long and wide,
 Put on it both bread and wine;
 Come and eat and drink, my three little babes,
 Come and eat and drink of mine.

But only for a brief moment may the mother hold them—

For yonder stands our Saviour dear,
 To Him we are assigned

Green grass grows over our head, Mother,
 The cold clay under our feet;
 Every tear that you shed for us,
 It wets our winding sheet.

These words were sung to a tender beautiful melody modulating from minor to major and back again. The idea that the sorrow of the living disturbs the dead is poetically present in another popular mountain ballad, *The Two Brothers*—more prosaically *John and William*. The grim episode is the murder of one brother by another for the sake of the heroine who

mourned the fish all out of the sea,
 The birds all out of their nest;
 She mourned her true love out of his grave
 Because that she could not rest.

Absorbing as was the quest of song, the collector's imagination was often stirred by appeals to the visual faculty—by this scene for instance: a woman with a child in her arms and a toddler clinging to her, crossing a creek where the stones were far apart and almost invisible; yet the crossing was made almost dry-shod. To this gift of exquisite equilibrium the young mother added a talent for song. Her chief contribution was the famous Border ballad, *Lord Lovel*. Hearing this old song of deathless devotion, again—as repeatedly—the listener was struck by the contrast between the environment of the singer and the scene of the ballad. Who can estimate what embers of poetry and romance have been

kept at least smouldering in the often meagre lives of the mountaineers by such lines as these, with their beautiful melody:

Lord Lovel he stood at his castle wall,
Combing his milk-white steed,
Down came the lady Nancie Belle
A-wishing her lover goodspeed.

Lord Lovel rides forth; but when he has been gone a year and a day "strange countries for to see", he has what the prosaic moderns term a telepathic wave; far more poetically the ballad:

A languishing thought came over his mind,
It was of the Lady Nancie.

Riding homeward he hears the toll of St. Pancras' bells. Asking the cause, he receives as answer—fairly startling in the lowly cabin proclaimed by a slender young woman in calico or homespun:

"There's a Lord's Lady dead", the women replied,
"Some call her the Lady Nancie".

This tender "hurtin'" story ends with that charming fancy which adorns so many songs of the love faithful after death: when Lady Nancie is laid in St. Pancras church and Lord Lovel in the choir, from their respective fond breasts spring the rose and the briar:

They grew and they grew to the old church top,
Then they could grow no higher;
They tied in a true-lovers' knot,
For all true lovers to admire.

From a masculine balladist was heard *The Mermaid*. Such songs of the old salt sea have a special appeal for these now far inland folk with who-knows-what memories of the deep in their breasts. The *Mermaid* is English sister of the *Lorelei*:

Last Friday morning as we set sail,
Not very far from land,
We all espied a fair mermaid,
With a comb and a glass in her hand, in her hand,
With a comb and a glass in her hand.

This vigorous melody was delivered with good effect but the singer was so much interested in conversation as often to interrupt his performance to discuss the ethics of singing—local revivalists having raised some doubts about the question. But the balladist's speculations also ran further afield, even into economics. In all earnestness one day he asked me if I could conceive how a

family of six could spend the luxurious income of seven hundred dollars a year. This prodigality was indulged in by a local preacher’s family—what could they buy?

As the mountain phrase goes, the minstrel above quoted “showed” the collector “into the light” of several old ballads and some newer ones. The latter are by no means equal to the earlier songs; they are such as may be heard almost anywhere from older members of families or old family servants. But among the best of this later group are: *As I Walked Out, Pretty Polly, Little Sparrow, Young Edward*. Songs like *The Lonesome Scenes of Winter* have a realistic appeal for these people many of whom dwell in mountain-shadowed cabins where “the sun don’t never shine”. The songs less ancient in character have a tendency to moralize, to brood over private wrongs and griefs in a manner entirely foreign to the free, narrative, impersonal spirit of the true ballad. Among these later songs lighter in mood are *William Hall* and *The Single Soldier*. Bright, tuneful but commonplace is the setting for *William Hall*—a not unattractive youth nonetheless:

O he was meek and he was modest,
And them pretty blue eyes ain’t all;
O he had black hair and he wore it curly,
And his name was William Hall.

A lively tune presents *The Single Soldier*—possessing contemporaneous interest:

A neat young lady at work in the garden,
A brisk young soldier came riding by,
A-saying: “Kind miss, don’t you want to marry?
A-saying: “Kind miss, won’t you marry me?”

Many such songs of soldiers and sailors—including *Constant Johnny* and *John Riley*—are based on a returning lover’s duplicity in pretending to have died in war or shipwreck—the ruse serving to test the damsel’s fidelity. These songs enjoy a popularity which definitely reveals a local trait—a humorous relish for mischievous strategy.

There is still another group of songs of greater interest—the spirituals or meeting-house songs. One early winter afternoon we set forth over the hills through a snow-touched landscape where browns and purples of late autumn still lingered. Finally after climbing till late afternoon we arrived in sight of good fences and well-kept fields, evidently the strongholds of efficient spirits. It was the domain of one of the best Mountain families, Irish in

strain, who here remote from others live a life of dignity, industry, comparative comfort. On our arrival the father and his two sons, "stout and stalwart" like those of the Carline's Wife in *The Wife of Usher's Well*, came forth to greet us. True lord of his castle, the father saluted us in dignified tones and extended hospitality: "Strange woman, since you have rid so far, light down and take the night with us". Accepting his invitation, we found the cabin spotless with its fresh wall covering of newspapers—another custom of the country. Father and sons sang to us in lusty voices, often pausing to correct and calumniate one another over an inaccurate word or phrase. Hymns were their chief numbers, these being contained in books owned by nearly every mountain family—"The Thomas Hymnal" and "The Sweet Songster". In these volumes there is only the text; there is no printed music in the mountains, the tunes all being traditional.

Never are these religious songs so impressive as when part of those singular gatherings, the Funeral Occasions or Funeral Meetings. These sometimes occur years after the passing of the person to be honored. They depend above all upon the possibility of getting several preachers. In these sparsely settled regions the loss of one person makes a deep mark upon the community; hence it is the custom to make as much as possible in an emotional and ceremonial way of bereavement; as large an audience as possible is desired.

Such a gathering we saw one day; as we rode along in the valley, from far away came the sound of voices and the tramp of horses. Presently arriving at a clearing, we saw a long cortege winding aloft to a typical mountain-top burying-ground—"under the wide and starry skies". Once the little procession had passed beneath the little arch inscribed: "God bless those who sleeps here", the service commenced. First a leader in a round resonant voice began "lining off" the hymn; this consists in reading one line, holding syllables and words as the reader's emotion dictates; then the whole crowd sonorously sings the line—and so on through the entire hymn. At close range the performance may seem harsh and crude; at a distance it is impressive; the long-drawn out melancholy phrases deepen one's sense of life, death and the human relation.

Many writers who have employed the mountaineers for fictional purposes have interpreted their occasional melancholy and languor as marks of an effete race. While these traits are frequently encountered, by no means are they dominant characteristics. The "old plain men with rosy faces" and remarkable

twinkling eyes, the elderly women who tramp miles and then sing twenty or thirty stanzas of a ballad, typify the physical and mental vitality of the highlanders. As one proof of their exuberance is quoted this incident: during a certain session of court the prisoners in jail adjoining the Court House had to be moved to some distance because their hearty singing disturbed the deliberations of the legislators. To hear the children of the Hindman Settlement School lustily carolling *Susie in the Parlor* and *Down Among the Daisies* is to be assured that the founts of joy and an inherited feeling for rhythm and melody are not exhausted. What is true of the children may also be noted when the young men and women are “running sets” while a spirited minstrel strums the exhilarating strains of *Sourwood Mountain*.

This sprightly song is a native classic. Other indigenous compositions have received much attention from philologists and folk-lorists. Feud songs—such as *The Rowan County Crew*, *Tom Smith’s Confession* and the like—have been noted as proving the communal origin of ballads and as illustrating the survival of the art of balladry. But not as a fine art is this phase of ballad-making practiced by native talent. Though it does thrive with some vitality, the results are not engaging; the narratives are usually tedious, the metres cheap and the tunes tawdry. The chief idea seems to be to get the story told in all its brutality and sordidness. This applies to another class of songs commemorating the Westward travel of half a century ago. Hence, all things considered, the feud song and similar contemporary compositions are poor in æsthetic values.

Yet for all this lack, they have their part, if not an elevated one, in rendering to the mountain people a service given by the older ballads—a service distinctly social in nature. For among these people music is primarily a means of beguiling lonely hours, a source of companionship and communal diversion. Illustrative is the pathetic account of a mountain bard who by merely scraping upon a wire-strung hickory limb, kept himself heartened through a dismal night when a near-by creek, justly named Perilous in Miss Furman’s stories, was tumultuously rising and threatening to damage his homestead.

Such a story is perhaps a more convincing test of music’s charms than are newspaper reports of attendance at opera and concert in large cities. Indeed more than once, watching eager groups around a ballad-singer, the collector felt that here was supremely demonstrated the magic of music and poetry—their power to cheer, to refresh heart and spirit, to perform that good function of art:

the liberation of the imagination. What a happy liberation when the environment is a lonely cabin, an isolated settlement! Who can estimate the solace, the emancipation of spirit which through generations the ballads have rendered to their land-locked inheritors?

But such a treasury of song and poetry is more than the mountaineers' own precious legacy. It is a common heritage of the English-speaking peoples which the simple but proud-souled highlanders are sharing with the outside world now going to them with opportunities of education and progress. Not always however with a higher order of music and poetry; for the cheap transmontane songs now following progress into this steep-walled land are, alas, so inferior to the *répertoire* of almost any mountain man or woman—the melodious strains, the stirring poetry of Long Ago.

In more senses than one the musical adventures herein recorded resembled the bagging of game; and there seems to prevail a hunters' code, as it were, encouraging a statistical avowal of quarry gained. Therefore it may be stated that in and about Knott County, where the chase was chiefly pursued, over a hundred songs were captured. These may be summarized according to the classification earlier made: traditional ballads; songs of later origin but of folk-song genre; local improvisations; religious and play songs.

The settings noted for the first and second groups differ from the melodies found in such authoritative collections as those of Chappell, Ritson, Rimbault, Christy and Mr. Cecil Sharp. These differences may be accounted for by two theories: that the tunes have changed through transmission down the centuries, though in some cases this is unlikely, especially when there is no trace of resemblance between the mountain version and others; secondly, that the melodies found in the mountains represent distinctive settings which have hitherto not been transcribed—owing to the infrequency of transcription at the time the ballads were brought to America, and later to some such baffling circumstances as beset the often arduous but ever-alluring quest of “the strange woman huntin' song-ballets” in the mountains of twentieth century Kentucky.